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Office of Information, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

BLACK SIBERIAN HARES AND OTHER "FUR RABBITS".

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The U. S. Department of

Agriculture during the past few months has received many inquiries regarding the merits of certain rabbits that have been extensively advertised as fur producers. Replies to such inquiries have stated that the demand for rabbit fur is such as to make it pay to save the pelts of domestic rabbits killed for food, but that raising rabbits for the fur alone would be unprofitable with any known breed. Some facts about the trade in rabbit skins will be of interest in this connection.

More skins of rabbits are collected and sold annually than of all other fur animals combined. Before the present war, Great Britain imported each year from 70,000,000 to 90,000,000 skins, while the home production added 30,000,000 more. The imported supply came from Australia and the nearer European countries. France, Belgium, Germany, the United States, and other countries also use large quantities of this fur. The bulk of it is sold in bales, bringing from 10 cents to 50 cents a pound, dependent on color and quality. The better class of skins sell by the dozen, bringing from 50 cents to \$1, that is, less than 10 cents each.

Baled rabbit furs are bought largely for felting purposes, the fur being made into cloth or coarse hats, while the skins are utilized for manufacturing glue. Fine hats are made of nutria (the fur of the South American coypu) or of nutria and rabbit fur mixed. The fur of the common wild rabbits of America does not

avoid such names, or, if they use them, frankly explain that the goods are cony or rabbit. These garments, while handsome and comfortable, have little durability and are therefore cheap.

Statements to the effect that certain breeds of rabbits produce pelts of high market value are unwarranted. The long-haired breeds, such as the Angora and the Siberian (both white animals) have poor pelts and the hairs are not well set in the skins. The short-haired varieties are much alike as to strength of pelts, but vary considerably in color. The English black-and-white has striking colors that might appeal to the fancy of individual wearers of fur garments, but they are not popular in the fur trade. Skins of piebald rabbits of any shade sell for less than those of solid colors. There is also a difference in quality of fur between hutch rabbits and those kept in the open, the latter having the better pelts.

Besides exaggerated statements as to value of fur, advertisements of fur rabbits contain totally false claims as to the origin of animals offered for sale. This practice is not a new one, for about 60 years ago, when the now well-known Himalayan rabbit was first bred in England, the statement that it originated in the Himalayan Mountains was believed <sup>by a</sup> fellow of the Zoological Society of London, who described and figured the animal in the society's journal as a new species. Rabbits recently advertised as fur animals are said to have been imported directly from Siberia in one instance, and from Mongolia in another. The further statement that the animals exist in these countries in a wild state is advanced. As a matter of fact well known <sup>to</sup> naturalists no wild rabbits occur in either country and the few species of hares found

bred strain. These black individuals are usually regarded by fanciers as undesirable and are discarded. However, if the black stock be chosen for reproduction, a black strain of Flemish giants is obtained in which bluish gray individuals recur from time to time, as several breeders in the United States have proved. Such a strain of Flemish giants is now offered as a new species imported directly from Siberia, a country without rabbits unless carried there as domestic animals.

It is not to be inferred, however, that black Flemish giant rabbits have no fur value. On the contrary, owing to their great size and solid color, the skins will probably sell for more than those of most other breeds. All known breeds of domestic rabbits belong to a single species, the European rabbit, whether they are known as Belgian hare, Flemish giant, Siberian, Himalayan, Dutch, Japanese, Kai-Gai, or any other name, and the attempt to palm any of them upon the public as a new species imported from a portion of the world not inhabited by rabbits is wholly unwarranted and to be severely condemned.